



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor
Department of Planning & Development
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**CITY OF SEATTLE
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**SEPA Threshold Determination
for proposed revisions to Seattle Municipal Code 23.41 and 23.76
to establish administrative design review for townhouses.**

Project Sponsor:	City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD)
Location of Proposal:	The proposed amendments would affect properties citywide in any zone where townhouses may be built.
Scope of Proposal:	The proposal would require administrative design review for proposed developments that contain three or more dwelling units, at least one of which is a townhouse.

BACKGROUND

Proposal Description

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is proposing to amend the Land Use Code (Title 23) to establish a new administrative design review program to apply to townhouses. The proposed administrative design review would be required for proposed developments in any zone that contain three or more dwelling units, at least one of which is a townhouse. The proposal establishes a new administrative design review process that compared to the current administrative design review process features simplified application submittal requirements and streamlined procedures. Amendments would also increase the amount of design flexibility available to project proponents through the administrative design review process in order to improve project design.

Administrative design review allows for the examination of development proposals based on site specific conditions and neighborhood context to help ensure neighborhood compatibility. *Citywide Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Development* and supplemental neighborhood specific design guidelines, all of which are adopted by the City Council, are in place and will guide the decision making under the new administrative design review process. An administrative design review process is distinct from the process that involves the City's Design Review Board in that the DPD staff provide design guidance and make the design review decision.

Design Review Threshold: The proposal would change the threshold for design review to require administrative design review for development in any zone when three or more dwelling units are created, at least one of which is a townhouse. Prior to this proposal the majority of new townhouse developments have not been required to undergo design review. The threshold for required design review in the Lowrise 3 (L3) zone has been eight dwelling units (meaning that development with nine or more dwelling units is subject to design review before the Design Review Board), and there has been no requirement for design review at all in the Lowrise Duplex/Triplex (LDT) or other lowrise zones (L1 or L2). A minority of townhouse developments have undergone voluntary ADR when an applicant seeks flexibility through development standard departures.

Scope of Potential Development Projects Affected: An analysis of the potential volume of development projects affected by the proposal was conducted. The department collected data on construction permits for townhouse units as well as applications for unit lot subdivisions (ULS). Together these measures provide an estimation of total townhouse volumes over the past few years, and can therefore help project the volume of future projects that would be subject to administrative design review per this proposal.

Over a three year period from 2006 – 2008 an annual average of townhouse units within the 3 – 8 unit range that would be subject to the proposal was 241 townhouse units in 65 projects per year. The years in the sample included a particularly high volume of townhouse construction, and economic conditions have changed. Based on these observed amounts of development, and assuming fairly consistent year over year production it is estimated that approximately 50 – 100 development projects, yielding approximately 200 – 400 townhouse units per year can be expected to be subject to this proposal.

Key features of the proposal include:

Streamlined Process. The proposal includes elements to streamline the existing administrative design review process. The proposal would reduce the design review process from two major steps – Early Design Guidance (EDG) and Design Review Recommendation – to one major design guidance step.

Simplified Application and Submittal Requirements. The proposal includes elements to simplify application and submittal requirements for project proponents. The proposal would reduce the complexity and cost of documents required to be submitted to DPD for design review, and would reduce the complexity of the design guidance report back to the applicant.

Design Flexibility. The proposal would increase flexibility in application of development standards, allowing designers and project reviewers greater choices to improve design. This would occur in two ways.

- 1.) Project applicants could seek formal development standard departures. Departures are modifications of development standards that can be allowed if the applicant demonstrates the departure results in better design than strict adherence to development standards and responds to the design guidelines. Departures would be evaluated by the planner in the

design review process. Projects with departures would be subject to an additional notice and appeal period compared to projects that do not.

- 2.) Minor design adjustments would be available to the applicant and project reviewer at the time of the Master Use Permit and Building Permit review. Design adjustments would be limited to a percentage of a dimensional requirement for a pre-specified set of development standards. If a development proposal, in responding to design guidance, includes a design adjustment within these parameters it could be approved without additional notice or appeal requirements.

ANALYSIS - OVERVIEW

The following describes the analysis conducted to determine if the proposal is likely to result in *probable significant adverse environmental impacts*. This threshold determination is based on:

- the proposal, as described above and in memoranda;
- the information contained in the *SEPA checklist*;
- additional information, including analyses, director's reports, the administrative design review code; and
- the experience of DPD analysts in reviewing similar documents and actions.

ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Adoption of the possible amendments would result in no immediate adverse short-term impacts because the adoption would be a non-project action. The proposed changes do not significantly increase the size or density of development projects or the likely number of projects that would be built. The discussion below generally evaluates the potential long-term impacts that might result from addition of a required administrative design review to the approvals process of future townhouse developments pursuant to this proposal.

A. Natural Environment

Earth, Air, Water, Plants/Animals/Fisheries, Energy

The proposal may apply in any zone throughout the City of Seattle where townhouses may be constructed. Within the context of the affected areas, there is minimal potential for additional future development that may result from the proposed changes that would generate significant adverse natural environmental impacts, including related to green house gas emissions. By following the established rules that require proper design of sewers/stormdrains, construction practices that minimize grading, drainage and dust impacts, and other applicable City regulations, the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts will be limited. Future project-related SEPA review would also afford the opportunity to identify and mitigate any site-specific impacts, as anticipated in SMC 25.05.330.

Residential energy demands are relatively low compared to those of commercial and other uses. There is minimal likelihood that additional energy use from future development (related to this proposal) would cause significant adverse impacts on energy systems. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

B. Built Environment

Land and Shoreline Use, Height/Bulk/Scale, Housing, Historic Preservation

Land Uses:

The proposal applies to all areas of the city where townhouses may be built. The bulk of townhouses are likely to be constructed in multifamily zones, which cover approximately 4,954 acres of lot area located throughout the city. As elsewhere in Seattle, these areas are, for the most part, developed. In areas where townhouses may be constructed, multifamily residential is the predominant use. This use is accommodated in a wide variety of building types and development densities, with a range that includes single family dwellings, attached townhouses, multi-story walkup apartment buildings, and highrise towers. Other uses, to a much lesser extent, are accommodated in these zones, such as schools, religious facilities, parks and other public facilities. The proposal does not modify or alter any allowable land uses. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of this legislation.

Development Standards:

The proposal does not modify any development standards. However, the proposal does provide for in some instance, flexibility in the application of certain development standards through the administrative design review process. As a result the proposal could lead to some minor modifications to the form and configuration of site specific developments, when compared to what is currently allowable by development standards. (See Design Flexibility above.) The option for flexibility in the application of certain development standards is predicated on whether the flexibility sought in the site specific development improves the project's design according to the Citywide Design Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Development and supplemental neighborhood design guidelines. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of this legislation.

Housing

The proposed action includes no changes that would influence the type and density of residential projects built in the future. No development standards are altered that would be anticipated to result in a loss of housing capacity within current zoning, and therefore there is no negative affect on capacity for development of housing units. There is also no significant adverse impacts on the probability for loss of housing units as a result of this proposal.

Affordability. The non-project proposal may have some indirect affect on the cost of developing townhouse dwelling units, and therefore may indirectly affect sale prices of new townhouse housing units. The department of planning and development has estimated that the proposed administrative design review may add approximately \$5,000 in permit review fees for townhouse development projects. In addition, project proponents of townhouse developments may incur additional costs of greater architectural services fees, and potentially some costs associated with longer land holding periods. These indirect effects of the non-project proposal may therefore add some cost to the sale price of new construction of townhouse dwelling units.

The magnitude of the potential cost impact is very small relative to the overall cost of newly constructed housing units, and the impact is limited to a small segment of the city's overall housing stock.

Under Comprehensive Plan growth targets, an additional 50,000 units are anticipated in Seattle by 2024, which would utilize about 35 percent of the total estimate of housing capacity. Projected townhouse volumes prepared with this report would comprise between 6% and 12% of the new housing constructed.

No significant adverse impacts related to housing are anticipated as a result of this legislation.

Noise, Shadows on Open Spaces, Light & Glare, Environmental Health, Public View Protection

The proposed legislation addresses shadows, open spaces, public views and similar elements of the environment. A goal of administrative design review for townhouses is to ensure neighborhood compatibility of new townhouse development by evaluating project specific proposal based on site conditions, context and established design guidelines. It is anticipated that the proposal will improve individual townhouse project's responsiveness to topics such as open space, light and glare impacts and public view impacts, and therefore may have positive net effects on these environmental elements. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of this legislation.

Transportation, Parking, Public Services and Utilities

Transportation and Parking

The proposed action includes no changes that would influence the standards for transportation and quantity requirements for parking associated with townhouse development projects built in the future. Therefore, no significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of this legislation.

Public Services and Utilities

Because the changes are not expected to change the amount or type of development that occurs no potentially significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a consequence of the proposed changes.

DECISION

- [X] Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).
- [] Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

Signature: _____ Date: _____
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